

# John Taylor Gatto

For other people named John Taylor, see [John Taylor](#) (disambiguation).

**John Taylor Gatto**<sup>[1]</sup> (born December 15, 1935<sup>[2]</sup>) is an American [author](#) and former school [teacher](#) with nearly 30 years of experience in the classroom. He devoted much of his energy to his teaching career, then, following his resignation, authored several books on modern [education](#), criticizing its ideology, history, and consequences. He is best known for the underground classic “Dumbing Us Down: the Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling”, and his magnum opus “The Underground History of American Education: A Schoolteacher’s Intimate Investigation Into the Problem of Modern Schooling”.

He was named New York City Teacher of the Year in 1989, 1990, and 1991, and New York State Teacher of the Year in 1991.<sup>[3]</sup>

## 1 Biography

Gatto was born in the [Pittsburgh](#)-area steel town of [Monongahela, Pennsylvania](#). In his youth he attended public schools throughout the [Pittsburgh Metro Area](#) including [Swissvale](#), [Monongahela](#), and [Uniontown](#) as well as a Catholic boarding school in [Latrobe](#). He did undergraduate work at [Cornell](#), the [University of Pittsburgh](#), and [Columbia](#), then served in the U.S. Army medical corps at [Fort Knox, Kentucky](#), and [Fort Sam Houston, Texas](#). Following army service he did graduate work at the [City University of New York](#), [Hunter College](#), [Yeshiva University](#), the [University of California, Berkeley](#), and [Cornell](#).

He worked as a writer and held several odd jobs before borrowing his roommate’s license to investigate teaching. Gatto also ran for the [New York State Senate](#), 29th District in 1985 and 1988 as a member of the [Conservative Party of New York](#) against incumbent [David Paterson](#).<sup>[4]</sup> He was named New York City Teacher of the Year in 1989, 1990, and 1991, and New York State Teacher of the Year in 1991.<sup>[3]</sup> In 1991, he wrote a letter announcing his retirement, titled *I Quit, I Think*,<sup>[5]</sup> to the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, saying that he no longer wished to “hurt kids to make a living.” He then began a public speaking and writing career, and has received several awards from [libertarian](#) organizations, including the *Alexis de Tocqueville Award for Excellence in Advance-*

*ment of Educational Freedom* in 1997.<sup>[6]</sup>

He promotes [homeschooling](#), and specifically [unschooling](#) and [open source learning](#). [Wade A. Carpenter](#), associate professor of education at [Berry College](#), has called his books “scathing” and “one-sided and hyperbolic, [but] not inaccurate”<sup>[7]</sup> and describes himself as in agreement with Gatto.<sup>[8]</sup>

Gatto is currently working on a 3-part documentary about compulsory schooling, titled *The Fourth Purpose*. He says he was inspired by [Ken Burns's Civil War](#).<sup>[9]</sup>

In 2011 he had two major strokes and received hundreds of messages of support from friends and fans worldwide. He suffered financial hardship since his medical insurance did not cover all his medical bills for rehabilitation.<sup>[10]</sup> The stroke occurred after he completed the filming of “The Ultimate History Lesson: A Weekend with John Taylor Gatto”<sup>[11]</sup> which was released in early 2012 by Tragedy and Hope Communications.<sup>[12]</sup>

## 2 Main thesis

What does the school do to children? Gatto asserts the following in “Dumbing Us Down”:

1. It confuses the students. It presents an incoherent ensemble of information that the child needs to memorize to stay in school. Apart from the tests and trials that programming is similar to the television, it fills almost all the “free” time of children. One sees and hears something, only to forget it again.
2. It teaches them to accept their class affiliation.
3. It makes them indifferent.
4. It makes them emotionally dependent.
5. It makes them intellectually dependent.
6. It teaches them a kind of self-confidence that requires constant confirmation by experts (provisional self-esteem).
7. It makes it clear to them that they cannot hide, because they are always supervised.<sup>[13]</sup>

He also draws a contrast between communities and “networks,” with the former being healthy, and schools being examples of the latter; in the United States, networks have become an unhealthy substitute for community.

### 3 Bibliography

- *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (1992).
- *The Exhausted School* (1993).
- *A Different Kind of Teacher: Solving the Crisis of American Schooling* (2000). ISBN 1-893163-21-0
- *The Underground History of American Education* (2001). (Complete Text online)
- 'Against School' (2003) (Complete Text Online)
- *Weapons of Mass Instruction: A Schoolteacher's Journey through the Dark World of Compulsory Schooling* (2008). ISBN 0-86571-631-5

### 4 See also

- Critical pedagogy
- *Deschooling Society* (book by Ivan Illich)
- Hidden curriculum
- *How Children Fail* (book by John Holt)
- Total institution

#### Other critics of public education:

- Zachariah Montgomery
- Richard Grant White

### 5 References

- [1] After learning he was regularly confused with another teacher named John Gatto, he added Taylor to his pen name.
- [2] "Birthdatabase (.com)". Stephenmorse.com. Retrieved 2014-03-10.
- [3] New York's Teachers of the Year, New York State Education Department (accessed April 5, 2014).
- [4] "THE ELECTIONS; New York State Senate". *New York Times*. November 10, 1988.
- [5] "I Quit, I Think". Johntaylorgatto.com. Retrieved 2014-03-10.
- [6] """. *Alexis de Tocqueville Award*. April 5, 2014.
- [7] Wade A. Carpenter (2007). "For Those We Won't Reach: An Alternative". *Educational Horizons* **85** (3): 153n8.
- [8] Wade A. Carpenter. "Behind Every Silver Lining: The Other Side of No Child Left Behind". *Educational Horizons* **85** (1).

- [9] The Fourth Purpose Documentary Series, Fourth Purpose Films (accessed March 21, 2008).
- [10] "Natural Born Learners : What will you do for John Taylor Gatto?". Radiofreeschool.blogspot.com. 2012-06-25. Retrieved 2014-03-10.
- [11] "The Ultimate History Lesson: A Weekend with John Taylor Gatto (Intro + Hour 1 of 5)". YouTube. 2012-01-01. Retrieved 2014-03-10.
- [12] "The Ultimate History Lesson: A Weekend with John Taylor Gatto". Tragedyandhope.com. Retrieved 2014-03-10.
- [13] See John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down. The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, Iceland Gabriola: New Society Publishers, 2005, p. 2–11

### 6 External links

- Official website
- Kinza Academy, Homeschooling with the Classics. Gatto is on the Advisory Board.
- Collection of essays Gatto is a regular columnist for The Link Homeschool Newspaper
- Transcript of radio interview with Jerry Brown
- Gatto's November 2007 visit to Netherlands: audio, video and articles
- Book reviews by Layla AR
- The Underground History of American Education by John Taylor Gatto (complete download)
- Collection of John Taylor Gatto quotes and videos

#### 6.1 Writings and lectures

- "Against School" – originally published in *Harper's Magazine*, September 2003
- "The Six-Lesson Schoolteacher" – originally published in *Whole Earth Review*, Fall 1991
- A set of quotes from Gatto and links to original essays
- "Institutional Schooling Must Be Destroyed"
- "The Tyranny Of Compulsory Schooling"
- "The Public School Nightmare: Why fix a system designed to destroy individual thought?", article published by Diablo Valley School
- "Why Schools Don't Educate - Teacher of the Year acceptance speech"

- “A Short Angry History of American Forced Schooling”
- Book reviews by Layla AR
- Everything We Think About Schooling Is Wrong! – Interview with Gatto (PDF file download)
- A set of quotes from Gatto and links to original essays

## 6.2 Multimedia

- The Ultimate History Lesson, 2012 on YouTube, released free
- Bartleby Project 2010 on YouTube
- 4th Purpose Promo – Trailer for *The Fourth Purpose*
- John Gatto Keynote Talks - Video: Five complete keynote talks by John Gatto (2004–2010)
- Altruists.org – download audio files of some of Gatto’s talks
- Video of Gatto interview, broken into topic sections
- Speech at a home schooling Conference by Radio for Peace (MP3)
- The Lew Rockwell Show, Aug 25, 2010
- Collection of Gatto Files, mainly MP3s

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### 7.1 Text

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